

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

The Starvation of Millions

Ambassador Page (London) to the Secretary of State, January 27, 1915

Hoover asks me transmit to you the following message: Potatoes and meat upon which Belgians have been partially dependent up to the present are now being rapidly exhausted and the cost of foodstuffs required to keep this population alive will forthwith increase from the six million to ten million dollars per month. Furthermore within thirty days three million French people north of German lines will be in similar position. Another fifteen million dollars will have absolutely exhausted the whole resources which we can possibly look forward to, leaving a period of three to four months before next harvest entirely hopeless unless support can be obtained from the belligerent governments. I believe the Allied Governments despite their view that they have no responsibility could be brought to make substantial contributions provided the Germans would cease to wring monetary indemnities from these people. To have this population thus fed must be even on military grounds a vast advantage to the Germans which far outweighs the value of the money which they now secure from their present method and from a humane point of view, if this situation is driven to its logical extreme, the moral responsibility for the decimation of the population must be laid at the German door.

I go to Berlin to-morrow for the purpose of making representations to the German Government that if they would agree to stop all requisitions of every character, and would do so

conditionally upon the Allies' giving adequate financial support to this commission, I have reason to believe I can secure large help from Allied Governments. In making this plea to the German Government it would help to have support of German opinion in America.

On account of the importance of the matter I think it advisable that you should know of this, and I even venture the suggestion that if it meet with your approval the German Ambassador be informed of it informally with a view to the possible enlistment of his influence.

The Germans cannot afford to have these issues tried in the court of American public opinion and they can well afford, not only from a point of view of military advantage but also of American public opinion, and above all, of humanity, to have this question settled on the above lines. I believe the Allied Governments have every confidence in the integrity of and ability of this commission to carry out the work, and, great as the task is, we should find ample compensation in doing it in the prestige it would win for our country and its ideals. Hoover

AMERICAN AMBASSADOR

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United States Department of State, Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs, 1915, Supplement, The World War, pp. 1026-1027